



**ACADEMY OF MUSIC AND DRAMA**

# **Exploring Tradition and Performance Strategies with J.S Bach's Sonata No. 1 in G minor for Solo Violin**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Key words: violin, early music movement, string technique, Zehetmair, Podger, Heifetz, Bach, baroque, performance practice, comparative study.

In this project, issues surrounding the performance of early music are explored through the lens of academic research, comparative study and practical investigations. How can a violinist find their perfect interpretation of Bach? Is there such thing as a 'happy medium', when performance is enlivened by historical information but not restricted? Comparing recordings from a baroque specialist, a twentieth century virtuosic master and a modern mainstream performer enables one to experience the polarities of interpretation of Bach's *Sonata No. 1* in G minor for solo violin, and learn from specific aspects of each performance such as vibrato, rubato and ornamentation. Learning from, analysing and imitating the interpretations of these superb violinists has opened doors to diverse playing styles and led to a considered interpretation of *Adagio*, the first movement of this sonata. Generalised 'results' and techniques explored in this project can be applied to other works of early music and further to more recent works: value remains in a well-considered and 'informed' interpretation.

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Problems and aims

The instrumentalist's approach to performing baroque string repertoire has always been influenced by a combination of fashions in mainstream performance, perceived authority of prominent artists and research into historic performance. Baroque music enjoys this particular controversy for many reasons including the absence of recordings from the era, the evolution of string instruments and dramatically changing aesthetics demands of audiences. Speaking from personal experience as a student in this climate, performing standard repertoire can present numerous dilemmas. It is common to encounter vastly contrasting opinions from different teachers, making it difficult to find an interpretation that pleases any professor. These differences of opinion often stem from ideological stances on historical performance and the scale between two extremes: complete loyalty to what is considered historically informed performance versus complete disregard to it in favour of the performers natural instincts in a modern climate using a modern instrument. While it is clear that there can never be a wholly 'true' or 'correct' interpretation, the aims of my thesis represent my desire to understand the specific issues and choices faced when performing early music. In this case, I use Bach's *Sonata No. 1 in G minor* for unaccompanied violin as an example, but I hope my findings will assist future encounters with early music. I also hope to gain a better understanding of the Early Music Movement, its development, and the extent to which it has permeated mainstream performance over the course of its existence. I expect that my newfound knowledge in these areas will inform my own performance strategies not only in regard to my interpretation of this sonata, but my approach to all early music.

### 1.1.2 Research questions

I now present some questions which have guided my research. Naturally I expect that further queries will occur to me during my investigation.

- How has the Early Music Movement developed during the course of its existence? How have favoured performance strategies changed during this time?
- How much have the Early Music Movement and the activities of historically informed performers permeated 'mainstream' performance?

- Can changing performance traditions be identified in different performances of Bach's *Sonata in G minor* for solo violin?
- Where do I stand in the context of different performance traditions?

And finally, the most important question of all:

- How can my exploration of the issues surrounding the interpretation of this sonata inform my own interpretation? How will my performance of the work change once I have thoroughly researched performance traditions and been influenced by other interpretations?

## 1.2 Methods

During the process of writing this thesis I will explore all aspects of the performance of at least part of this sonata, all the time referring to attitudes of scholars of the Early Music Movement. Issues to be considered will be separated into two categories: 'rhythm and timing' which will include rubato, tempo and any rhythmic alterations, and 'expression and phrasing', concerning tone, fingering, dynamics, vibrato, bowing, ornamentation and portamento. Part of my research will be a comparison of the approaches of several performers from a variety of backgrounds. For this comparative study I will use a range of recordings, including a recent recording of my own performance of the sonata. Though I have been educated to some extent in the performance of Baroque music, I do not think my own interpretation of the sonata is currently particularly informed or considered. This recording taken before starting my research will therefore expose any inadvertent tendencies and subconscious influences I may have and help me discover where I stand in the wider context of performance of Bach's G minor *Sonata*.

I include a small amount of musicological research which informed my practical research whilst writing this project. I think it is important to understand how scholarly opinion on the performance of early music has changed, particularly when undertaking the aforementioned comparative study: I must understand what was 'fashionable' at the time each recording was taken. Primary sources such as performance treatises' and articles from the *Early Music Magazine* can help me with this ambition.

As well as musicological research and comparative study, I intend this thesis to include ongoing individual active research. For each aspect of phrasing and expression/rhythm and tempo, I will experiment with my own realisation in my own practise of the sonata. This will mean practising ways of playing that do not come naturally to me, but I think it is vital to learn all the solutions before

choosing my 'favourite' interpretation. Part of my active research will also include borrowing a period instrument and investigating how the differences between this and a modern one can change performers' instincts and therefore their interpretation.

### 1.3 My personal musical background

As I intend this thesis to have a personal practical approach, I here give a short explanation of my own personal musical background which may help to explain any performance choices I am currently making in my interpretation of Bach's *Sonata No. 1 in G minor*,

I started my musical studies when I began taking violin lessons in Derbyshire, United Kingdom at an early age. I worked through the system of graded exams which exists in the UK until the age of 17. As well as scales, sight reading and aural tests, a student must pick three pieces from the grade syllabus for each exam. The 'A list' usually comprises a variety of music mostly from the Baroque period, and I soon found this to be my favourite piece in each exam. My teacher had studied with an Early Music specialist, so I imagine that I was taught to play these pieces in a fairly 'authentic' way (or at least, as authentic as a young beginner violinist can be). At around 18, I first played unaccompanied Bach: some movements from the D minor Partita. However, I cannot claim my interpretation was well considered.

My family enjoys music and the preferred genres in our house were western classical music and folk and traditional music. Around the age of 15, I took up a keen interest in folk music and was particularly taken with the traditional music of Scotland, North East England and Scandinavia. I realised that I have a skill for learning 'by ear' (without sheet music), a method favoured by folk musicians. This is a method of learning which I also rely on whilst playing classical music: I often find it difficult to be original in my interpretations once I am familiar with a recording.

I studied for my bachelors in Music in Newcastle, UK. There I learnt with Tristan Gurney of the Edinburgh Quartet, whose repertoire is mostly limited to late Classical and Romantic music, i.e. not early music. It was at Newcastle that I first performed Bach's complete *Sonata No. 1 in G minor*. As the music course at Newcastle places a heavy emphasis on the academic aspect of studying music, I also undertook several modules in early music and one in organology. I do not believe that this academic study influenced my practical performance of baroque music at the time. In fact, I would go so far as to say that as I begin this project, it is the first time I have been at all critical of my

interpretation of any piece beyond listening to a few recordings or following my own instincts and the instructions of a teacher. This is the main reason I am keen to investigate the interpretation of Bach's *Sonata no. 1 in G minor* for solo violin.



## 2. THE EARLY MUSIC MOVEMENT: SOME INFORMATION AND REFLECTIONS

### 2.1 A brief overview

Historical correctness – being true to the score and the composers wishes – has been a persistent notion, and it is this concept and different scholars' interpretation of it that has epitomized the Early Music Movement. It is generally regarded that practitioners' concern with historical correctness was largely a twentieth century preoccupation. More specifically, the so-called movement took place in the English speaking world between the 1980s and '90s, but earlier between the 1950s and '80s in continental Europe, where (mostly German-speaking) musicologists 'exhaustively debated' the issues surrounding it before their British-American counterparts.<sup>1</sup> Generally, it is believed by promoters of historically informed performance that interpretations that utilise period instruments and playing techniques will create a sound and experience for the listener that is closer to the one envisaged by the composer. Furthermore it will match more closely the compositional style.

Many of them had very contrasting ideas of authenticity: in the early twentieth century, Landowska wrote (despite being a pioneer of historically informed performance at the time) that she 'never tried to reproduce exactly what the old masters did. Instead I study, I scrutinise, I love and I *recreate* ... I am sure what I am doing ... is very far from the historical truth'.<sup>2</sup> In 1978, Harnoncourt similarly claimed that there was no such thing as authenticity, saying he is not and has never been concerned with it.<sup>3</sup> He went so far as to say that 'Werktreue' (a German term which refers to the 'truthfulness' of a work by composer, centring on the composer's intentions which can give a work 'real meaning') was a 'harmful concept which led to false directions'. Instead of recreating a work he wanted to gather as much information as possible about it, its meaning and reproduction as possible and then use all his abilities to make it understandable for today's time. However, it is clear that many were enthusiastic in their support for historically accurate performance. Vastly different opinions outline the polarities of the debate surrounding early music performance and also the geographical reach of the discussion.

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<sup>1</sup> Dorottya Fabian, "The Meaning of Authenticity and the Early Music Movement: A Historical Review", *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, Vol. 32, No.2 (2001), 154.

<sup>2</sup> Denise Restout and Robert Hawkins (eds.), *Landowska on music* (New York: Stein and Day, 1964), 355-356.

<sup>3</sup> Fabian, "The Meaning of Authenticity", 155.

There has always been an uneasy relationship between music historians and performers. Whilst it would seem logical that musicologists would do research and after that, performers put this research into practise, it cannot in reality be this simple. As Bernard D. Sherman writes, 'music history tries to restrict itself to what is supported by data, but performance suffocates under that restriction'.<sup>4</sup> It could be argued that the aims historians and musicians fundamentally conflict: while the former are concerned with recreating the past, the latter want to create something new (even if they do want it to be historically accurate!). As Rosen points out, 'paradoxically, in so far as the purpose of a performance of a Mozart concerto is a reconstruction of eighteenth-century practice rather than pleasure or dramatic effect, just so far does it differ from an actual performance by Mozart'.<sup>5</sup>

There are other problems associated with the desire for authenticity in performance. The movement has been known to be selective in the aspects of historical playing it has championed: methods of conducting in the French Baroque by banging a staff on the ground in front of the orchestra, for example, will (thankfully!) never be resurrected. Practical problems also exist as well as very philosophical issues to be considered. As today's society is very different to that of the eighteenth century, audiences will experience emotions in different ways – for example, an eighteenth century punter's view of 'anger' or 'intensity' in music might be tame by twentieth century standards of emotion. Should one care more about creating an authentic experience or emotional reaction in an audience at the expense of the music sounding the way it would have done in the past? Or does this render the performance historically inaccurate? Some historians also worry that emerging obsessions with playing with history signal a loss of confidence in the way modern performers want to play instinctively: perhaps we have stopped believing that our way is the 'right way' and started looking to the past for answers.

Of course, it can be possible to have a compromise between these two ideals; it is even possible that one assists the other, with often extraordinary results. This happy medium is what I wish to find in my own playing: how can I use historical information to enliven my modern performance?

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<sup>4</sup> Ben Sherman, *Inside Early Music: Conversations with Performers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 2.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Rosen, *The Classical Style: Haydn, Beethoven, Mozart* (New York: Norton, 1971), 107.

## 2.2 The 'baroque expressive'

Dorottya Fabian and Emery Schubert assert that there were three main stages of approaches to Early Music Performance:

1. 'expressive emotional' (up to 1930s)
2. 'modernist literalistic' (1940s-1970s)
3. 'baroque expressive' (1980s onwards)<sup>6</sup>

I am mostly concerned here with the shift between stages two and three.

The discourse of the mid-twentieth century led to a very literalistic and metronomic style of Baroque music performance. This discourse emphasised motor rhythms and metric hierarchy. It described baroque music as 'direct and forthright', and praised performances that had 'springy rhythmic liveliness'. Aspirant authentic performance pre-1980 tended to be characterised by uniform dynamics and tempi, a clean sound and an attempt to 'avoid interpretative gestures beyond those notated'.<sup>7</sup> This approach led to derision towards practitioners of historically informed performance among mainstream musicians, who scorned the lack of expression in their music.

Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, writing in 1984, takes particular offence at the state of early music performance in the years before. In his seminal contribution to 'The Limits of Authenticity' in *Early Music Magazine*, he compares 'authentic' scholar-performers recordings to recordings from before 1970. All the so-called 'authentic' performances illustrate greater restraint, whilst he notes overt expression in the pre-1970 performances. He asks: 'are we to infer that true Purcell style is authentically to be seen as restrained-dramatic by suggestion rather than by example?', whilst lamenting the lack of emotion in a recording of Dido's Lament Aria.<sup>8</sup> Leech-Wilkinson finds similar contrasts in all pairs of recordings he examines: from tenth century plain song to Bach's Brandenburg

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<sup>6</sup> Dorottya Fabian and Emery Schubert, "Baroque Expressiveness and Stylishness in Three Recordings of the D Minor Sarabande for Solo Violin (BWV 1004) by J. S. Bach", *Music Performance Research*, Vol 3 (2009), 36-55.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Taruskin, Daniel Leech-Wilkinson, Nicholas Temperley and Robert Winter, "The Limits of Authenticity: A Discussion", *Early Music Magazine*, Vol 12 (1984), 13.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

Concertos, performances pre-1970 were expressive and those claiming to be authentic were clear but 'simplistic'.<sup>9</sup>

This literalistic style fell out of fashion, first in Europe and then in England, and Baroque music making became very different post-1980 as more research and analysis suggested that expressiveness was actually more authentic. Baroque treatises suggest that music should be 'highly expressive'<sup>10</sup> and writers of the eighteenth century often complained about 'wretched' performers who 'only played the notes'.<sup>11</sup> It became popular to think of playing as if one was speaking, meaning that delivery became much more expressive and it was much more acceptable to include interpretative elements that were not in the score. The new style was characterised by punctuated articulation, even some shallow and selective vibrato, uneven bow strokes and rhythmic flexibility.

Though the 'repression of expression' eventually lost favour in the musicological world, I believe the 'sewing machine style' aesthetic lingers on in the preconception of many less-informed mainstream musicians.<sup>12</sup> For example, in my experience as a freelancer doing on-the-day gigs for choral society performances of baroque masses or oratorios, it is very common for a conductor to scold the use of vibrato, employ terraced dynamics and not much in between, ask for exactly the same *ritardando* at the end of every movement, and be overly concerned about tempi whilst ignoring issues of tone and colour almost entirely. Few musicians with no background in historical performance are aware that vibrato actually was employed by baroque musicians, but only as an ornament and not a constant colour to a piece. Despite this, it is clear from research carried out by Fabian and Schubert that the non-musician listener responds far more favourably to 'baroque expressive' performances.<sup>13</sup>

## 2.3 From 'niche' to 'mainstream'

Though musician-historians were often accused of pedantry and amateurishness and branded the 'early music mafia' in the 1970s and 1980s, there seems in more recent years to have occurred a 'true cross-fertilisation' of ideas, where mainstream performers find themselves more accepting of

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>11</sup> Fabian, "The Meaning of Authenticity", 156.

<sup>12</sup> The earlier style dubbed 'sewing machine music' by many practitioners at the time due to the insensitive and relentless way faster movements were played.

<sup>13</sup> Fabian and Schubert, "Baroque Expressiveness and Stylishness", *Music Performance Research*, Vol 3 (2009), 36-55.

their ideas.<sup>14</sup> Some conservatories and teachers were reluctant at first, anxious to maintain their 'living tradition' and hesitant in the belief that master performers and great composers have handed down the way pieces should be played through generations of pupils and followers.<sup>15</sup> In short, they had thought that the study of historically informed performance was entirely irrelevant to them. This idea was increasingly challenged, however, when large numbers of recordings showed vast change in historically informed performance styles (described above). By the mid-1990s historically informed performance had become an equal alternative to mainstream performance, and recording companies were increasingly interested in funding related projects.

Looking at the list of recordings of Bach's solo works for violin, one is left in little doubt that there must have been some influence and mixing of ideas around the turn of the millennium; mainstream performers were at this time very aware of historically informed performers and the scene was looking much less homogenous. There were only two recordings of the works on period instruments before the mid 1990s and numerous recordings of mainstream violinists. However, from around 1995 until 2005 it appears that the early music practitioners had reclaimed Bach's works: there were no prominent mainstream recordings made during this decade.<sup>16</sup> After this time, mainstream violinists began recording the works again, but it cannot be denied that this decade must have influenced their style in some way – it does not matter whether this was consciously or subconsciously.

The results of this mutual influence and interaction between mainstream and historically informed musicians are plentiful. Period instruments have been more accepted, non-expert modern musicians now give themselves a professional edge by brushing up on their early music performance techniques, some are open to different tunings and most will frown on a wholly inaccurate performance of baroque music. Thus, historically informed performance now occupies a space closer to mainstream performance, though arguably its intent has been diluted.

However, it seems there can never be a genuine 'cease fire' despite growing cooperation, and some prominent musicians and scholars are still hostile. In 2011, following an acclaimed performance of Bach's solo works at the BBC Proms in the Royal Albert Hall (London), violinist Nigel Kennedy was

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<sup>14</sup> Sherman, *Inside Early Music*, 5.

<sup>15</sup> Dorettya Fabian "Ornamentation in Recent Recordings of J. S. Bach's Solo Sonatas and Partitas", *Israel Studies in Musicology Online*, Vol 11 (2013), 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

heavily critical of performers and ensembles that aimed to be historically accurate. He believed they lacked the 'passion, fire and dynamism' that early music composers deserved, naming those who performed on period instruments as 'unbelievably blinkered'. According to Kennedy, quoted in a *Guardian* article on 13<sup>th</sup> August 2011, 'specialists are pushing Bach into ... a ghetto, which leaves many people feeling that Bach's music is merely mathematical and technical'. He continued to say that he felt it his job to try and 'keep Bach in the mainstream and present his music with, rather than without, its emotional core'. Needless to say, Kennedy's performance was not one I would call 'historically informed'.<sup>17</sup> Remarks such as his confirm my assertion that many mainstream musicians have little or no awareness of the rise of 'baroque expressive' performance.

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<sup>17</sup> "BBC Proms 2011: Nigel Kennedy Plays Bach" (2011, August) (Video File). Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tj74\\_vnnFFA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tj74_vnnFFA).

### 3. THE BAROQUE VIOLIN

Instruments of the early baroque period were vastly different to those violinists play today. Developed over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it seemed as if these period instruments were no longer relevant or cared for until steps in reviving them were made by Arnold Dolmetsch and a few contemporaries. Dolmetsch began to manufacture fine instruments of the baroque era such as viols, lutes, harpsichords and violins. He believed that performers should have the possibility to play music written by Eighteenth Century composers on the instruments they were written for and thus began a fashion for period instrument performance.

During my work on this thesis, I borrowed a baroque violin. This chapter comprises observations I made whilst experimenting and examining this violin and information I have gleaned from reading academic sources and interviews with other violinists.

#### 3.1 Differences between a Baroque and a modern violin

Here I will only present the main differences I notice between the Baroque violin and the modern violin; later will come evaluation of what these differences mean in terms of ease of playing, scope for expressiveness and other issues.

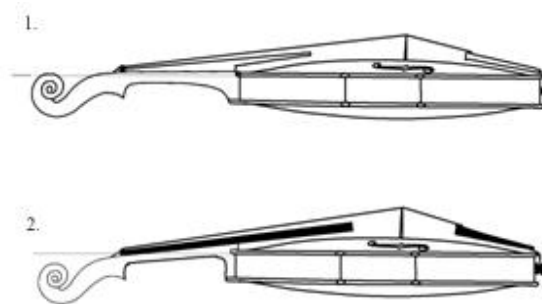


Figure 1. from [www.themontiverdiviolins.org](http://www.themontiverdiviolins.org)

- 1) A baroque violin
- 2) A modern violin

The differences in shape are immediately obvious upon comparison: the baroque violin is slightly shorter than a modern violin due to its shorter neck. Its neck protrudes straight outwards from the body, whereas a modern violin's neck will angle downwards slightly to be parallel with the

fingerboard. Because the fingerboard must also be angled downwards on a baroque violin to allow for the height of the bridge, the neck/fingerboard structure will be thicker the closer it gets to the body, as shown above (fig. 1). Here, one can also see that the fingerboard is shorter on the older instrument.

Violinists and luthiers in the eighteenth century generally (though not exclusively!) favoured gut strings, rather than the metal wound strings we use today. However, overspun metal strings were not a 'modern invention' and were actually common and popular at the start of the Baroque period, but simply fell out of favour in the early seventeenth century.<sup>18</sup> It is believed that they were brought back into fashion gradually, with a metal wound G string used as early as the late 1700s. Consequently, the late baroque violin had an improved tone with a clear sounding G string. The period instrument I experimented on for the purposes of this thesis has entirely gut strings.

The design of the violin bridge has also undergone significant change. The bridge on a modern violin (which is believed to be based on that devised by Stradivari) is taller and has a bigger arch, purposefully sloped steeper on the G string side and more gently towards the E string. This allows for 'the utmost response and sonority'.<sup>19</sup>

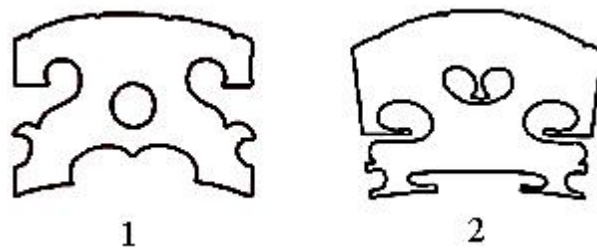


Figure 2. <http://www.themonteverdiviolins.org/baroque-violin.htm>

No 1 shows baroque violin bridge, 2 shows modern bridge.

Illustration by George Stoppanil

Other clear differences include the lack of chin rest and shoulder rest, the different pitch and intonation, and the different strings. The shoulder rest was invented by Louis Spohr in the 1920s –

<sup>18</sup> Howard Mayer Brown and Stanley Sadie (eds.), *Performance Practise Vol II: Music after 1600*, (New York: Norton, 1990), p47

<sup>19</sup> David D. Boyden, "The Violin and its technique in the Eighteenth Century", *Musical Quarterly*, Vol 36 (1950), p12.



even later than other developments.<sup>20</sup> The violins I experimented with are tuned to A415, approximately a semitone flatter than the modern preference norm of A440.

### 3.2 Baroque and modern bows

The bow has evolved considerably since its invention and continued doing so after the violin reached its current state. In fact, it is commonly believed that the bow was not standardised until the late 1700s. Thus, there are contrasting accounts of exactly how much it curved away from the hair. In the latter part of the century in France and Italy, the stick was either straight or had a convex arch, whereas German bows were much more varied.<sup>21</sup> It is clear, however, that the curve of the stick was the main difference in shape from its modern descendant.

I also notice that the baroque bow is shorter with thinner hair, making it lighter than my modern version.

### 3.3 Technical obstacles and advantages

I must emphasise here that I have no prior training on a baroque violin, so my findings must be viewed as the perspective of a 'beginner' baroque violinist! To help me, I read a variety of online articles about the differences in technique and watched some videos of baroque violinists in the hope of copying anything that seemed standard in the way they played. I discovered that there seems more variation in how to hold the instrument and bow as there is in modern violin practise, possibly because no-one can be sure about any standardised method of the baroque period. There are many contradictory primary pictures and texts showing different holds: under the chin, on the chest, chin off, chin on, and so on.

The above differences became much more apparent when I first tried to play with the new (old!) instrument. I was struck not just by how different the instrument looked and sounded, but by the way I had to make radical changes to my technique to be able to play it. I was made to forget many of the things I have learnt from my training as a classical violinist, and find my own solutions to obstacles.

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<sup>20</sup> Robin Stowell (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Violin*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 12.

<sup>21</sup> Boydon, "The Violin and its Technique", 15.

Initially, the most obvious and pressing difficulty was how to support the instrument. Whilst playing my modern violin I use a tall shoulder rest and a substantial chin rest. These modern additions enable me to support the instrument from my shoulder and chin, leaving my left hand free of responsibility and hopefully devoid of tension. Once these supports are removed, the weight of the violin is shifted to the left hand with minimal help from the chin and shoulder. This particularly affected my ability to shift cleanly, and I was required to extend, stretch and slide more when changing position: my hand was now the primary support for the instrument so it could no longer 'hop' without jeopardising the position of the violin. I think that this obstacle would affect fingering choices whilst performing as I did not feel safe making unnecessary shifts, though it is possible that if a violinist's technique was better adapted to the baroque instrument this might not have been such an issue. It is also true that the absence of a shoulder and chin rest made a noticeable difference to the sound of the instrument. I observed that open strings were able to resonate much more and tuning sounded clearer, especially in chords. This made me wonder about my own violin so some days after my experiments with the older instrument had ended, I removed the chin rest and played without the shoulder rest. Perhaps it would be possible to feel the benefits of this aspect of a period instrument on a modern one? My findings were that there was some difference in sound (the tone was even clearer because of my modern metal wound strings), but it was almost impossible to play more romantic or virtuosic repertoire that required rapid shifting of positions.

Predictably, the gut strings on the older instrument make a marked difference on the sound and are mellower with a darker tone. They also feel different to play on, as they are strung with less tension and therefore require less pressure from the left hand to make a clear note. It is clear to me when playing on this violin that it is more suited to smaller halls and ensemble playing, not least because of these strings, which undoubtedly cannot project in the same way as modern strings.

### 3.3.1 Using the Baroque Bow

The next most obvious technical challenges were the myriad issues I faced when playing with the baroque bow for the first time. The shorter length meant I had to be much more economical with my bow distribution but this was difficult when coupled with the thinner hair and greater tension, which made me instinctively want to play with a faster bow speed creating 'airiness' in the sound. In an interview with Violinist.com, Anne-Sophie Mutter spoke about her use of the baroque bow for some recording and a tour in 2008 and made similar comments about the 'airiness', 'transparency'

and 'purity' of sound. However, while this quality sound was entirely desirable to me whilst practising some slower, sweeter movements from the *Sonatas and Partitas*, I notice that it cannot make a sound strong or intense enough to satisfy my modern tastes in the heavier movements (for example, the *Chaconne* from *Partita no. 3*, or the *Fuge* from this G minor *Sonata*). I can sympathise with Mutter's assertions that the bow cannot effectively fill a large hall:

*On stage, it's a little lost. So there are some performance techniques which work in some environments, and some do not. You do have to adjust. Of course on tour, we also play with baroque bows. But I think on the recording, you hear even more subtle things than you would hear in a large hall.*<sup>22</sup>

Another difficulty I find is in sustaining with this bow: it is almost impossible to sustain a long note due to the thinness and extra tension in the hair. I also have to work much harder to make *legato* bow changes, especially between chords and double stops. On a modern bow, these places would be characterised by intensity and weight from the arm and index finger, but here I find no resistance and must try a different interpretation. Therefore, movements like the *Adagio* from *Sonata No. 1* and *Sarabande* from *Partita No. 2* become much lighter and less intense, compared to the richness and full tone I can produce with a modern bow.

During my experiments, I was using a later version of the baroque bow (perhaps from Italy/France). The earlier German version was much more convex in shape, much more like a 'Robin Hood' bow. The hair was also slacker and the violinist had to control the tension with his/her thumb. This made it easier to sustain two or three notes at once, and made polyphonic playing in Bach a much more feasible matter than it is today with the modern bow, where the hairs are too close to the stick to comfortably play three or four strings at once.<sup>23</sup> In Germany, where polyphonic composition was more common, this modern bow took longer to become popular. In Italy there was a marked decline in counterpoint as first the tauter baroque bow and then the modern bow became the modes.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Laurie Niles, "Violinist.com Interview with Anne-Sophie Mutter", *Violinist.com* (10<sup>th</sup> October 2010), <http://www.violinist.com/blog/laurie/200810/9189/>

<sup>23</sup> Emil Telmányi, "Some Problems in Bach's Unaccompanied Violin Music", *The Musical Times*, Vol 96 (1955), 16.

<sup>24</sup> Henry Joachim, "Bach's Solo Violin Sonatas and the Modern Violinist", *The Musical Times*, Vol 72 (1931), 221.

Once I got used to the difficulties I faced with bow distribution and the tightness and thinness of the hair, I also noticed that it is easier to play with clear articulation in the faster movements of Bach with the older bow. Though a *spiccato* is fairly impossible for me to control because of the added tension in the hair, it is easier to make non-legato playing clearer and more stylish in the *Giga* and *Courrete* of the D minor *Partita*, and the E major *Preludio* in *Partita No. 3*. Anne-Sophie Mutter expresses similar praise for the articulation achieved when playing with the baroque bow when talking about her orchestra accompanying her in a Bach violin concerto.

*[The baroque bows have] helped us for the articulation of the third movement of the Bach. The whole dance-like feeling, the whole spin – the joie de vivre which is totally gone if you use too moderate a tempo, or if you are not really taking seriously the articulation. The articulation – especially in the A Minor concerto – is really difficult to do, if at all possible to do in an elegant way, with a modern bow.*

All in all, I found my experience with the baroque violin enlightening, especially when combining this experience with research around the subject. I feel that I now understand a little more the instruments that J. S. Bach might have had in mind when he composed the *Six Sonatas and Partitas*, how their first performances might have sounded differently, as well as understanding further any technical dissimilarities and how these might affect sound and interpretation.

## 4. COMPARATIVE STUDY

### 4.1 Aims

In undertaking a 'comparative study', I have discovered different ways in which Bach's G Minor *Sonata No. 1* can be played, and thus have found an interpretation that suits me by picking and choosing my favourite approaches to various aspects of its performance. I will show the contrasts between these different 'models' of performance: these could be called historically informed, twentieth-century virtuosic and modern performance style. With the help of books and articles, I have specifically tried to identify what one might call 'historically informed' when referring to each aspect of playing and will also use my newfound experience with the baroque violin to inform my judgement about how much is symptomatic of the instrument used in each case and how much is down to interpretation.

### 4.2 Presentation of recordings

#### 4.2.1 Rachel Podger (1968- )

Rachael Podger is an English baroque violinist. She is widely revered as a leading performer of Baroque music and thus represents my interest in historically informed performance. The recording I have used in this thesis is her first recording of the *Six Sonatas and Partitas*, on Channel Classic Records, 1999 which was received favourably by the early music community.<sup>25</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Jascha Heifetz (1901-1987)

Heifetz was a Lithuanian born violinist, widely considered one of the greatest violinists to have ever lived. He had virtuosic abilities from an early age, and was notoriously reviewed by fellow maestro Fritz Kreisler following his debut: 'we might as well take our fiddles and break them across our knees!'. Heifetz enjoyed a long and successful recording career, and the recording I used for this thesis was 'Bach, *Sonata No. 1, Partita No. 2*', released in 1956 on RCA Victor Red Seal.<sup>26</sup> As a violinist, he is an accepted member of the 'old-school'.

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<sup>25</sup> Rachel Podger, *Sonatas and Partitas*, Channel Classics NI/B00000J7YS, 1 audio CD, released June 1999.

<sup>26</sup> Jascha Heifetz, *J. S. Bach: Sonata No. 1/Partita No. 2*, RCA Victor: B004Z2N4N4, 1 audio CD, released 1956.

#### 4.2.3 Thomas Zehetmair (1961- )

Thomas Zehetmair is an Austrian violinist and conductor, and was the Musical Director and Chief Conductor of the orchestra in my home town, Newcastle upon Tyne between the years 2002 and 2014. During this time I heard him play the Brahms and Bruch Violin Concertos and received a masterclass from him as part of a quartet playing Dvorak. He is highly regarded, though not quite prolific in his field yet! His recordings of Bach show influence of early music practitioners, but are at the same time very individual. I have used '*Bach – Sonatas & Partitas for Solo Violin*', released on Warner Classics in 2007. This is his second recording of the work; the first was made some decades previously in 1983.<sup>27</sup>

### 4.3 Phrasing and expression

#### 4.3.1 Fingering and bowing choices

When interpreting a new piece, a violinist has two very basic ways of making her/himself different: change the fingering or the bowing. Different choices will be made depending on technical ability and overall effect on the style and sound. I have listened in detail to the first movement, *Adagio*, and edited a score to show the bowings and fingerings I hear. Of course, this cannot be an exact science. To help me, I also watched some videos of each artist and learnt a little about their style. Discovering the choices they have made in this piece and others has helped me to make educated guesses about which fingerings and bowings they may have chosen in these particular recordings.

The recordings of Jascha Heifetz were predictably the most interesting to analyse in this way as he plays in an old fashioned style and makes choices that are less predictable (and often less tasteful!) to my modern ear. This is a testament to the amount historically informed performance has permeated mainstream performance: despite the fact that Heifetz is one of the most important violinists of the twentieth century, it would be unusual for a violinist to choose to play Bach now as he did then.

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas Zehetmair, *J. S. Bach: Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin BWV 1001-1006*, Apex: B000MM00I4, 1 audio CD, released February 2007

First, I will consider his choices of fingering. Initially striking are the deliberate slides (I have shown these using lines between the notes) he adds to some of his shifts, coupled with his extensive use of the A string (*sul A*) in higher positions. I hear the slides, always emphasised with added vibrato, as hugely expressive ‘sighs’, or ‘wails’. These are very much techniques of a romantic aesthetic: keeping a phrase on one string means that Heifetz is able to add more vibrato, keep a constant colour and play legato more effectively. These are all very romantic ideals, but not at all historically authentic.



Figure 3. My transcription of Heifetz's opening to *Adagio*, including the fingerings and bowings I think he chose.

On a baroque violin, it is preferable to stay in lower positions as the instrument is much more resonant there. It is also unlikely that violinists of the era would have possessed the technical prowess to play so high on the lower strings: far easier to just use the E string! Heifetz also makes use of natural harmonics several times in the *Adagio*, notably in this excerpt in bar 6, where the A string harmonics give a feeling of lightness and suspension: a momentary change in character. It is interesting that Zehetmair also chooses to use a harmonic here (shown in figure 3).

Heifetz has changed many of Bach's original bowings. To me, an obvious change he made is at the end of bar 3. Here, he creates a more syncopated feeling by changing bow after the eighth note beat. In doing this he puts great emphasis on the F sharp, completely changing the feel of the 32<sup>nd</sup> notes, but also showing where he feels the individual 'voices' are here: by slurring the F sharp, G, D and E flat together he separates them from the notes surrounding and creates dialogue not implied in Bach's bowing.

Another decision to change Bach's original bowings occurs at the very end of the piece, where Heifetz makes unprecedented changes to Bach's long slurs of 32<sup>nd</sup> notes:



*Figure 4 last two bars of Adagio, as written by Bach*



*Figure 5 My transcription of Heifetz's realisation of Adagio's final two bars*

Heifetz's changes to Bach's original bowing here make the final phrase sound laboured to me; where there should have been one long 'wave' or 'motion', he breaks up the gesture. While I understand his intention behind this – the F#/G/Ab 'squeeze' in particular becomes much more expressive with this bowing – it is too heavy for my taste. On the whole, I find that this is my opinion wherever Heifetz splits any of the original long slurs in this movement.

Finally, Heifetz makes extended use of *Portato* in this movement (shown in fig. 3) using tenuto lines above the notes in many of the slurs).<sup>28</sup> As shown in the excerpt above, Heifetz breaks up the majority of Bach's long slurs using this bow technique. Ironically, he only plays truly legato when using separate bows; for example, between the fourth and fifth eighth notes in bar 7. Though I would prefer a more varied approach to ones use of bow in this movement, I do like Heifetz's use of

<sup>28</sup> 'Portato' in string playing generally means semi-detached articulation using a pulsing bow movement. In a slur, a violinist will speed up the bow on each note and slow down in between notes to create this effect.



*portato* in some places here as it gives the scales a more expressive and lyrical quality. For example, I believe this non-legato articulation suits the ascending gesture at the end of bar 2 very well.

When directly comparing Podger and Zehetmair's openings of the *Adagio* to Heifetz's, there seems little in common and all in difference. Podger and Zehetmair seem to stay true to Bach's original bowing suggestions: Podger in particular actually plays many of the long gestures in one bow where many violinists split for effect and phrasing. In my opinion, these bowing decisions mean that Bach's intentions with the 32<sup>nd</sup> note scalic gestures are clearer and more convincing. By not dwelling too much on any individual small note or making too much of the micro-phrasing, our two contemporary performers focus the listeners' attention on the larger structural notes and chords. Podger and Zehetmair treat these 'flourishes' as real ornamentation, making them sound far more improvised than Heifetz chooses to. The inclusion of the big slurs also helps to keep the bow light, adding further to this improvised feel.

When experimenting with some other aspects of Podger's bowing choices, I was struck most by her extensive use of up-up bowings (these can be seen more in the second half of the movement, but are shown here in bars 4, 5 and 7). 'Hooking' bowing like this can mean that there is more contact or 'stickiness' in the second note, more so than a slur or separate bows. It can sound more effortful and build tension through the two notes or chords. Ironically, it has a very similar effect to Heifetz's *portato*. However, instead of in the ornamental flourishes which she keeps very legato, Podger often uses the up-up bowing just before an important note or chord to emphasise it.



Figure 6. My transcription of Podger's opening to *Adagio*, including my perception of her fingering/bowing choices.

Both Heifetz and Podger have chosen to ignore Bach's separation of the notes in the cadence point at the end of bar 8, making a very legato slur over the dotted 8<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> notes. This creates a calmness not present in the final cadence point at the end of the piece, in which Podger separates the equivalent notes and Heifetz adds some *portato* instead of allowing his slur to be legato.



Figure 7. My transcription of Zehetmair's opening to Adagio

Both Podger and Zehetmair choose to play almost all of this first section in first position, and do not shy away from playing on the E string in their interpretations. In this aspect, they are decidedly different from Heifetz, who playing in high positions on the A string to avoid the harsher E. As discussed above, Podger and Zehetmair have the more 'historically informed' approach here; it was harder to play in higher positions on a baroque instrument and practitioners of the day were much less afraid if the E's metallic sound, enjoying its openness and brilliant sound.

## 4.3.2 Chords

### 4.3.2.1 Context

When examining chords in unaccompanied Bach and the way a performer realises them, it is important to be aware of context. Some chords occur when Bach writes in a polyphonic style including more than one voice, most recognisable in the *Fuge* movement, shown below:



Figure 8. bars 19-26, *Fuga*

If a violinist wishes to maintain the integrity of polyphonic writing, s/he should play chords as far as possible without splitting them, so as to play as close as possible to what is written in print and show the interactions between the voices in ‘true’ time. Leopold Mozart wrote in 1787 that ‘there are, furthermore, some other passages, where three notes are written one above the other, which must be taken in one stroke, at the same time, together’.<sup>29</sup>

However, not all chords in the G minor *Sonata* are included as polyphony. Some are purely harmonic, like this example (bars 12-13) from *Adagio*:



Excerpts like this need to be treated completely differently. Though the early model of the bow had the ability to play three or more notes at once, it was not designed to sustain chords for long. Imagine the first bar of the *Adagio*. All four notes of the G minor chord cannot be held for the duration of the printed quarter note in such a slow tempo, so to add interest and keep the harmony going for such a long note length the chord must be arpeggiated (or ‘split’) by way of embellishment.

<sup>29</sup> Leopold Mozart, *Versuch einer grundlichen Violinschule*, (Augsburg, 1756; trans. Editha Knoch as *A Treatise on the Fundamental Principles of Violin Playing*, London: Oxford University Press, 1948), ch. 8, sect. 3, para. 16.

#### 4.3.2.2 The first chord

I will begin by considering the way each of our performers approaches the very first chord in this group of sonatas and partitas. The *Adagio* opens with a four note G minor chord (g-d1-bb1-gg2) spread over all four strings of the violin. It suits the instrument well, presents the key of the work and can be played in an infinite number of ways, as I discovered when listening to many recordings. As the opening of the *Adagio* is not a piece of polyphony, it is here accepted that the chord will somehow be split.

Podger splits the chord 2+2+2, meaning she plays first the g and d1 together, then the d1 and bb1, then the bb1 and gg2. She breaks the chord very deliberately and cleanly and after the last split, loses the bb1 and allows the high gg2 to sound alone before continuing. She moves slowly between the notes, weighting them quite evenly in tone and time. Though it is necessary to break the chord at least once because of the curved bridge and the nature of the bow, Podger is the only one of our three violinists who breaks the chord twice. I think this is because she wants to feel the relationship between the d2 and the bb1 as well as that between g/d1 and bb1/gg2.

Zehetmair's first chord has a more swinging and carefree feel: he plays in a much less deliberate way (when listening here I feel that it could almost have been an accident!). He sounds the low g alone first, moves to the d1 alone for a split second before coupling it with Bb and sweeping up to the Bb/G. Zehetmair holds his bb1 with the gg2 for much longer than Podger, enjoying the interval between them for almost the duration of the chord.

If Zehetmair played the opening chord with velocity, a word I would associate with Heifetz's realisation is 'magnetic'. He splits the chord once, swapping from g/d1 to bb1/gg2 with little flexibility or overlap, meaning a listener does not feel the space between the d1 and bb1 and that the low g/d1 double stop feels much more like a *vorslag* moving into the top two notes, rather than the bottom of a chord. This opening feels much more like an 'announcement' or an 'arrival': there is little doubt of a strong and confident presence.

My pre-thesis interpretation could be described as closest to Podger's: I like to split the chord twice, though I am naturally tempted to do it quicker than her. However, I am drawn naturally to the carefree feel of Zehetmair's opening and consider this my 'favourite' – listening to myself I am aware that I play this chord a little heavily for my taste and when compared to Podger and Zehetmair.

#### 4.3.2.3 Fuga

The *Fuga* has three voices and a simple, easy to recognise theme, beginning on the dominant (D), moving to the tonic (G) and then back to the dominant:



Podger varies the speed and weighting of each split in this movement, making her interpretation seem carefully thought-out and expressive. She is unconcerned with maintaining rhythmic integrity, instead choosing to dwell on more expressive chords and intervals by splitting them slowly with a 'sticky' right arm. She often leaves melody notes alone after the split, making the fugal structure clear to the listener. I also sense that Podger is aware of all the intervals that make up individual chords, frequently emphasising dissonances and softening their resolutions; hers is a diverse approach.

As far as possible, Zehetmair tends to play all the notes in a chord at once and finishes by playing the melody note alone. This makes the chords in his *Fuge* unobtrusive: any splits are almost inaudible and are generally treated as harmonic decorations with little melodic or expressive significance. He even gives the final chord of the movement the same treatment – arguably, it lasts for less time than its allotted two beats and is split very fast, ending the movement on the Bb and G instead of the more common solitary G. To me, Zehetmair's approach to chords in the *Fuge* gives the majority of the movement an almost fiery or aggressive feeling – there is no way a violinist can play chords softly in this way, and when playing like this in the stronger passages the chords sound 'hit' with a strong vertical attack. This is quite a contrast to the way Podger seems to take care of each chord. One place Zehetmair does choose to change his approach is in bars 36-41, a passage where the chords take more of a melodic role. Here, Zehetmair employs a softer right hand and 'squishy' bow in order to make this progression more expressive and emphasise the lines.

Heifetz is also fairly uniform in the way he plays his chords: like Zehetmair he seems not to enjoy taking time over the relationships between the notes during the split, and instead employs a more 'magnetic' and vertical approach. For the chord progression starting in bar 30, Podger, Zehetmair and Heifetz all choose to split 2+1. Heifetz is particularly true to this choice, keeping the feeling of

magnetism and paying little interest to the lower voices. Here, he effectively ‘signposts’ the descending line of the upper voice, but I think this could cause the listener to miss the chord progression and suspensions in the upper two parts. Podger also chooses to split her chords in this passage 2+1, but she varies the speed and length of split, focussing more on the lower voice than Heifetz did. I also sense that she creates a ‘hierarchy’ of expression, spending longer and introducing vibrato in last chord of bar 30 and separating certain chords from the rest of the progression. It could be argued that in doing this, Podger loses any line and direction implied here.

#### 4.3.3 Ornamentation

Much has been written about different approaches to ornamentation in Early Music, and there are so many contrasting views that it would be impossible to take them all into account. Musicologists, modern and historical alike, seem to agree that one must rely on good taste to know when to use ornamentation and to know how much is appropriate. C. P. E. Bach asserted that ‘above all things, a prodigal use of embellishments must be avoided’ and urged performers to ‘regard them as spices, which may ruin the best dish or gewgaws which may deface the most perfect building’.<sup>30</sup> When to add personal ornamentation seems to have been set out according to Neumann by thinking in terms of ‘degrees of ornamentation’:

*As a rule of thumb [...] an adagio is skeletal if it contains no, or very few, notes smaller than eighths; if it has first-degree diminutions if it contains many sixteenth notes; it has second-degree diminutions if it contains a wealth of thirty-second notes or smaller values. The skeletal types were always in need of embellishment; the first degree types may fulfil stylistic requirements in the lower range [...] further ornamental additions are optional and often desirable on repeats; the second degree designs were in no further need of enrichment but on repeat could be somewhat varied.*<sup>31</sup>

So, it must be agreed that the *Adagio* in Bach’s G minor *Sonata* must be an example of second-degree ornamentation, and is therefore not to be tampered with. He tended to notate diminutios in his works for solo violin, and even grace notes that other composers notated with symbols were written out. Therefore, there is little room for improvised ornamentation in the *Adagio* (or indeed

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<sup>30</sup> Carl Philip Emmanuel Bach, *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments* (Berlin, 1753), trans. William Mitchell (New York: Norton, 1949), 81.

<sup>31</sup> Frederick Neumann, *Essays in Performance Practice*, (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1982), 521.

much of the work), as Bach appears to have realised his wishes on the page already. Though this may well suit a modern violinist unused to improvisation or uninformed in the ‘correct’ methods of ornamentation,<sup>32</sup> Bach was chastised for it in his own time. The tensions between a composer’s ‘honour’ and a performer’s prerogative is apparent in many historical sources. Scheibe in 1737 lamented the lack of space for improvisation: ‘every ornament, every little grace, and everything that one thinks of as belonging to the method of playing, he expresses completely in notes’.<sup>33</sup>

In order to analyse this aspect of the *Adagio*, I choose to view all written out scalar ‘flourishes’ as ornamentation. It is clear to me that these notes serve as embellishment between the main structural notes. Four chords in a bar and a half, joined together by scales of thirty-second notes make up the first phrase. This is a clear example of pseudo-improvisatory work that a different composer of the era might have left to a violinist’s instincts. However, whilst exploring the wildly different approaches Podger, Heifetz and Zehetmair take to these embellishments it is still clear that even meticulous Bach is open to interpretation.

First I will look at the first phrase. In Podger and Zehetmair’s recordings, the last thirty-second note before the two sixty-fourth notes at the end of each scale is lengthened. Fig. 9 shows Bach’s original composition of the first bar, and fig. 10 shows the way they and many other violinists choose to perform it. I judge that Podger holds this thirty-second note for the longest, followed by Zehetmair and then Heifetz, who sticks completely to the printed rhythm.



Figure 9.



Figure 10.

<sup>32</sup> John Butt, *Bach Interpretation: Articulation Marks in Primary Sources of J. S. Bach*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 207-208.

<sup>33</sup> Cristoph Wolff (ed.), *The New Bach Reader: A Life of Johann Sebastian Bach in Letters and Documents*, (New York: Norton, 1999) 338.

The effect in Heifetz's recording is one of solidity and gravitas, but the printed rhythm gives him less direction than Zehetmair and Podger. Holding this note for longer is effective in preparing the ear for the next structural chord. I have only found a handful of recordings that do not include this alteration so conclude that it is an established performance tradition: indeed, I hear in my own recording that I also make this change, despite never having made a decision to do so!

The way each performer treats the thirty-second notes differs greatly. Heifetz chooses to play each note very deliberately and with great equality and little variation in tone, whilst Podger favours a slight sense of forward movement and crescendo. She begins slower and speeds up towards the end of her scales. Zehetmair takes this idea to more of an extreme: I feel a strong sense of motion in his thirty-second notes, which he plays much faster than Heifetz. There also exists tension at the start of each gesture here; the way he teeters on the first note before swinging through the rest reminds me of the feeling of teetering on the top of a rollercoaster. For this reason I find Zehetmair's treatment of these embellishments most effective. He creates a more improvisatory feel that I do not sense in the other recordings, making these embellishments sound most like ornamentation.

#### **4.3.3.1 Trills**

Trills are also a contentious matter for performers. Once again, I found Fredrick Neumann's view to be enlightening. In his seminal work on ornamentation, written in 1983, he argues that 'modern' ideas of J. S. Bach's trills being at all uniform or formulaic were 'highly suspect'. He considered it to be unrealistic to limit Bach's works to a single design of trill, chastised students for taking Bach's own table of ornamentation too literally, and advocated a much wider 'freedom of trill designs'.<sup>34</sup> The consensus among musicologists and performers today approves that trills in Bach should begin on the upper note, but this seems to be where agreement end. Our three violinists vary in their realisation of trills in this sonata: the speed of trill, changing speed, the inclusion of turns or *vorslags/nachslags*, and the choice of starting note are all in dispute.

Here I take some examples of trills in the first movement. The trill at the end of the first phrase is particularly ornamental: half of the bar is a decoration of the note C, emphasising the seventh in an implied V7-I harmony. Controversially, Heifetz chooses to begin his trill on the main note, C. In doing this, he emphasises this note and suggests a cleaner sounding harmony as the D is far less prominent. He keeps his trill fast and maintains this speed throughout, which also helps to keep the harmony

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<sup>34</sup> Neumann, *Essays*, 312.



clear. I view this as an unfussy approach, but rather inexpressive and old fashioned. Moving on, Podger and Zehetmair both favour an emphasis on the D, beginning slower and speeding up during the trill. Zehetmair takes this to the greatest extreme, with a huge difference in speed at the end to the speed he began. This to me is also inappropriate and feels a little laboured and disruptive to what I feel should be an overall motion forwards to the final chord in the phrase. Podger creates the same tension initially with resistance on the D using a slower bow stroke but continues her trill with a more measured speed.

Looking over at the rest of this movement, Heifetz seems to follow the precedent set in this first trill and plays each one uncomplicatedly and at a similar speed from start to finish. He begins all of his trills on the main note rather than the upper note, and this as a marked effect on the sound at his cadence points. It is feasible that he does not view the trill as a harmonic or expressive device as Podger and Zehetmair appear to.

Listening to Zehetmair play the three trills in bars 3-5, I hear great variety in the way he plays them. In bar 3, the trill is very fast and with little variation in tone between both notes: perhaps he considers this a 'passing' trill, a comparatively insignificant piece of embellishment. In bar 4, Zehetmair plays more of an upper mordent than a trill, sufficiently showing us the semitone between the G and F sharp but landing for longer on the F sharp, as a 'sigh'. Finally, the trill in bar 5 is more of a mini-cadence point, and so Zehetmair treats it more like the first phrase described above. His approach to trilling is sometimes a little too 'different' for my tastes but I find it useful to hear his intention and ideas of the function of each one signposted. Again, I feel this invokes a stronger feeling of improvisation than Podger and Heifetz.

In her recording, Podger continues to execute trills in much the same way as she did the in first phrase. It is interesting to note that she adds some new trills where they are not in the original manuscript. For example, in bar 7, she trills on the open E string in the fourth beat. This bar is particularly tense, harmonically speaking, and includes three large jumps in register: first a compound perfect fourth, later a minor sixth and then a minor seventh. This is also a poorly resolved seventh double stop. It is even arguable that we were expecting an E flat rather than an E natural at the end of this bar, if following the rules of a descending melodic minor scale. Perhaps this is why Podger has decided to emphasise this note with an open E string semitone trill – effective in creating a rather harsh sound quality in this tense moment. More generally in her recording of the *Six*

*Sonatas and Partitas*, Podger seems to follow the advice of Neumann and others to vary ornamentation on repetitions: a historically informed way of adding interest to the same music.

#### 4.3.4 Vibrato

As an issue, vibrato in early music seems to be a highly divisive matter. Rightly so, as the manner of its employment can change our entire perception of a work. In his eighteenth century violin method book, Francesco Geminiani sparked extensive debate with his almost teasingly brief instructions regarding vibrato, or ‘the close shake’, as he called it.

*To perform it, you must press the finger strongly upon the string of the instrument, and move the wrist in and out slowly and equally, when it is long continued swelling the sound by degrees, drawing the bow nearer the bridge, and ending it very strong it may express majesty, dignity etc. But making it shorter, lower and softer, it may denote affliction, fear etc. and when it is made on short notes, it only contributes to make their sound more agreeable and for this reason it should be made use of as often as possible.*<sup>35</sup>

The general consensus among contemporary musicologists is that prior to the twentieth century, string vibrato was used selectively as an ornament – nothing like the continuous kind generally employed by modern string players. However, some take the Geminiani’s final sentence here to mean that he did advocate a continuous vibrato. This would place Geminiani at odds with most other discussions on vibrato in string treatises of the eighteenth century. Leopold Mozart provides a far more detailed account of how vibrato ‘should’ be employed: he discusses it in two chapters of his famous *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule* (1756) notably condemning the use of a continuous vibrato, stating that ‘performers there are who tremble constantly on each note as if they had the palsy’.<sup>36</sup> Tartini’s instructions are also typical, saying that ‘this ornament makes the final note of a phrase sound excellent and when the note is long, it flatters both the tone and the melody’.<sup>37</sup>

Among contemporary players, how much, what type and how often, use of vibrato often comes down simply to personal taste as much as interpretation of historical treatises; especially among mainstream performers. In her own comparative study of violinists playing Bach, Fabian found that

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<sup>35</sup> Francesco Geminiani, *The Art of Playing on the Violin* (London, 1751), 6-8.

<sup>36</sup> Leopold Mozart, *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule*, 203-204.

<sup>37</sup> Guiseppi Tartini, *Traite des Agrements de la musique* (Paris, 1771) ed. Edwin Jacobi, trans. Cuthbert Girdlestone (Celle: Hermann Moeck Verlag, 1961), 56.

baroque specialists were much more likely to vary their vibrato.<sup>38</sup> Variation could include adding vibrato only at the end of a long note, ‘hair pin’-like swells combined with *crescendi* or tapering off vibrato whilst creating effective *diminuendi*. Fabian asserts that ‘quite clearly, for these violinists vibrato is an expressive device whereas “hard-core” mainstream performers use it as a part of basic tone production.’<sup>39</sup>

Fabian offers this table, which shows data she collected whilst analysing the vibrato of many violinists playing Bach. She deduces a steep decline in the use of vibrato since 1995 and a narrower vibrato among historically informed and younger players.<sup>40</sup>

Table 1. Shows performer’s use of vibrato when recording Bach’s Sonatas and Partitas. HIP stands for historically informed performer: one who aims for ‘authenticity’.

<b>Performer, date</b>	<b>Rate (in cycles per second)</b>	<b>Width (in semitones)</b>	<b>Frequency of use</b>
<b>Luca 1977</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>0.14</b>	<b>39.5%</b>
<b>Kremer 1980</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>0.26</b>	<b>91%</b>
<b>Ricci 1981</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>76%</b>
<b>Kuijken 1983 (HIP)</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>0.15</b>	<b>63.3%</b>
<b>Shumsky 1983</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>0.21</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Zehetmair 1983</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>0.44</b>	<b>14%</b>
<b>Mintz 1984</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>90%</b>
<b>Schröder 1985 (HIP)</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>0.15</b>	<b>55%</b>
<b>Buswell 1987</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>0.19</b>	<b>89%</b>
<b>Perlman 1987</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>0.33</b>	<b>72%</b>
<b>Ughi 1991</b>	<b>(quite fast)</b>	<b>Not wide</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Mullova 1993</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>0.16</b>	<b>44%</b>
<b>Tetzlaff 1994</b>	<b>6.2</b>	<b>0.16</b>	<b>73%</b>
<b>Hugget 1995 (HIP)</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>0.12</b>	<b>46.3%</b>
<b>Van Dael 1996 (HIP)</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>0.13</b>	<b>17%</b>
<b>Poulet 1996</b>	<b>6.2</b>	<b>0.19</b>	<b>72%</b>
<b>Matthews 1997</b>	<b>Rarely measurable; end of trills</b>		<b>&lt;1%</b>
<b>Wallfisch 1997 (HIP)</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>0.06</b>	<b>45.4%</b>
<b>Gähler 1998</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>0.15</b>	<b>&gt;60%</b>
<b>Barton-Pine 1999</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0.21</b>	<b>62%</b>
<b>Podger 1999 (HIP)</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0.14</b>	<b>27%</b>
<b>Ehnes 1999</b>	<b>6.3</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Hahn 1999</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>0.23</b>	<b>100%</b>

<sup>38</sup> Dorottya Fabian, *A Musicology of Performance: Theory and Method Based on Bach’s Solos for Violin*, (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2015) 137.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 141.

<b>Kuijken 2001 (HIP)</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>0.16</b>	<b>60%</b>
<b>Lev 2001</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>0.12</b>	<b>61%</b>
<b>Brooks 2001</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>0.12</b>	<b>67%</b>
<b>Gringolts 2001</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>0.16</b>	<b>&lt;3%</b>
<b>Szenthelyi 2002</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>0.3</b>	<b>82%</b>
<b>Barton-Pine 2004</b>	<b>Nil</b>		
<b>Kremer 2005</b>	<b>6.2</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>44%</b>
<b>Tetzlaff 2005</b>	<b>6.5</b>	<b>0.21</b>	<b>91%</b>
<b>Tognetti 2005</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>0.1</b>	<b>39%</b>
<b>Fischer 2005</b>	<b>6.4</b>	<b>0.14</b>	<b>50%</b>
<b>Holloway 2006 (HIP)</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0.17</b>	<b>39%</b>
<b>Besnosiuk 2007 (HIP)</b>	<b>Very little</b>	<b>Not measurable</b>	<b>&lt;5%</b>
<b>Barton-Pine 2007</b>	<b>6.1</b>	<b>0.12</b>	<b>14%</b>
<b>St John 2007</b>	<b>6.7</b>	<b>0.23</b>	<b>22%</b>
<b>Mullova 2008</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>0.12</b>	<b>11%</b>
<b>Ibragimova 2009</b>	<b>Nil</b>		
<b>Khachatryan 2009</b>	<b>6.8</b>	<b>0.17</b>	<b>89-94%</b>
<b>Faust 2010</b>	<b>Fast quivers</b>	<b>&lt;0.1</b>	<b>&lt;1%</b>

Though only two of our performers appear in Fabian's table, and she only analysed the first of Zehetmair's recordings, the findings of my comparative study seem easily predictable. Podger stays in keeping with historically informed performance practice and uses vibrato narrowly and sparingly as an expressive effect. Heifetz's recording was made decades before any of those in this table, and we can assume that the trends shown here mean that he will use a constant and fairly wide vibrato. Zehetmair's recording is likely to be a little less predictable: I estimate that he will employ vibrato in a similar way to Podger. It is interesting to note that in 1983 recording that he used the slowest and widest vibrato of the bunch, but also used it less than many of the HIP players!

Podger's vibrato is indeed narrow and unobtrusive: it is often difficult for me to distinguish in her tone production what is pitch vibrato and what is bow vibrato, she deploys the latter so effectively. She uses vibrato effectively to emphasise certain notes, for example in the implied descending bass line of bars 6 and 7. Here, the vibrato can add a strong feeling of lamentation and also differentiate this voice from the others. Podger also has a habit of using vibrato to develop the sound of longer notes, starting cold and adding it to warm the end of the note. Towards the end of the *Adagio*, I find this a little tedious and predictable – perhaps it is historically informed, but it does mean that vibrato has less of an effect towards the end of the piece for me.

True to form, Heifetz remains in keeping with the ‘old-school’ romantic ideal of vibrato that is as continuous as possible. Impressively, he even manages this in many of the double stops: testament to how important this non-stop vibrato was to him. His use of vibrato is wildly different to Podgers, but very effective in its own way; I find his tone particularly beautiful here in the *Adagio*. During the 32<sup>nd</sup> notes, vibrato combines with portato of the bow to add further to the lamenting quality of the scalar passages. He mainly keeps a fast vibrato of the finger, but is able to change its speed to successfully emphasise any nuances he wishes to highlight.<sup>41</sup> I would suggest that changes often come when he is aspiring for a calmer sound, slowing and widening his vibrato slightly, for example in *Fuga* from bar 55. This bar includes the theme low in the violin’s register and no double stops, and occurs after a tense harmonic sequence of fiendishly difficult chords.

It is interesting that, according to Fabian’s table above, Zehetmair uses less vibrato (14%) than Podger (27%). She also notes that he uses wider and slower vibrato in his 1983 recording of Bach than any other violinist analysed.<sup>42</sup> I find that Zehetmair often does the opposite to Podger in the development of long notes, especially in the *Adagio*: where she adds vibrato at the end of a note to warm it up, he habitually starts with a prominent vibrato and lets it decay with the note. This often makes Zehetmair’s interpretation sound cold and austere, giving it a more modern atmosphere than Podger and Heifetz’s.

#### 4.3.5 Portamento

While it is accepted now among most of the historically informed performance community that vibrato can be used sparingly as an expressive ornamentation, portamento (sliding from one note to the next for expressive purposes) still seems fairly ‘off limits’ while playing baroque instrumental music, and it is well known that its use has declined rapidly over the course of the last century.<sup>43</sup> As mentioned earlier in chapter two of this project, it is more difficult to shift with the baroque set up, and when experimenting with sliding I found still more technical difficulties. A proper sounding portamento relies on support from the neck and shoulder that the left hand can push against, creating resistance and therefore a slide when changing position. Without this support, the hand must either ‘caterpillar’ up the fingerboard or hop by releasing pressure entirely, making a slide

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<sup>41</sup> Dario Sarlo, *The Performance Style of Jascha Heifetz*, (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2015), 127.

<sup>42</sup> Fabian, *A Musicology of Performance*, 141.

<sup>43</sup> Grove Music Online defines *Portamento* as an ‘expressive effect, denoting the emotional connection of two notes’. The word derives from an Italian word, meaning ‘carriage’ or ‘carrying’. So, one is literally carrying one pitch to another – in practise, sliding from one note to the other.

impossible. This would suggest to me that portamento by baroque violinists would have been far from commonplace in Bach's time.

However, there are references to *portamento della voce* in vocal treatises dating back to the seventeenth century: Doni writes of 'dragging the voice little by little, almost imperceptibly, from the low to the high, or reverse ... which is a sort of *portamento della voce*.'<sup>44</sup> Doni and other scholars of the day wrote that it was important to unite the three registers of the voice (head voice, chest voice and falsetto) with portamento, especially in recitatives. In Italian baroque, it is possible that singers had an influence on string and wind players who may have imitated their portamento sparingly. Since then, portamento in singing was occasionally described using derogatory terms such as 'swooping' and 'scooping', and even labelled by J. F. Schubert as 'disgusting and unbearable' when in the wrong place.<sup>45</sup> Speculatively speaking, it could be possible that this attitude and others poisoned the string community against the use of portamento in baroque music too. Who knows; one day it could undergo a similar resurgence in the historically informed performance as vibrato!

Despite the existence of the possibility that it was used in at least some areas of baroque performance, portamento is a rarity in Podger and Zehetmair's recordings of Bach's unaccompanied works. However, it is employed generously by Heifetz, contributing to the more romantic feel of his interpretations. Dorottya Fabian and Etian Ornoy observed that 'Heifetz's varied types of slides could all be intentional, contributing to his unique sound and colourful tonal palette, i.e. part of his artistic signature'.<sup>46</sup> Below is an example of portamento used by Heifetz in *Siciliana*.



Figure 11. *Siciliana*, bar 11, showing Heifetz's portamento.

<sup>44</sup> *Oxford Music Online*, s.v. "Portamento" by Elliot Harris, accessed May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Dorottya Fabian and Etian Ornoy, "Identity in Violin Playing on Records: Interpretation Profiles in Recordings of Solo Bach by Early Twentieth-Century Violinists", *Performance Practice Review*, Vol 14 (2009), 9.

## 4.4 Tempo and Timing

Choosing the right tempo is fundamental to an effective interpretation: an unsuitable tempo can destabilise a performer's intended mood or feeling, but an appropriate one can enhance it. Tempo words can be very important for deciding how fast to play a movement but it is true that Bach was often not generous with his tempo words: except for works titled as concertos or sonatas, tempo headings in Bach are relatively rare occurrences. However, in this sonata, we are lucky that all movements but the third include a brief tempo word: *Adagio*, *Fuga (Allegro)*, *Siciliana*, *Presto*. Abravaya argues that we should beware of assigning too specific values to different tempo markings, such as *Adagio*, *Lento*, *Largo* on the one hand and *Vivace*, *Allegro*, *Presto* on the other, as sometimes Bach himself is not consistent with his use of these words.<sup>47</sup> Each word has different meanings and traditions depending on the context; they are wide open to interpretation by our three performers.

The table below shows the running times for each recording. This is a clumsy way to view tempo and rhythm, but our first impression must be of the fact that Zehetmair always plays the fastest, and Heifetz generally the slowest. This situation is exaggerated in the slower movements: in the dance-like *Siciliana*, there are ninety seconds between Zehetmair and Heifetz.

	<u>Podger</u>	<u>Zehetmair</u>	<u>Heifetz</u>
<i>Adagio</i>	3:42	3:14 *	4:43
<i>Fuga</i>	5:38	4:46	4:47
<i>Siciliana</i>	3:03	2:36	4:06
<i>Presto</i> **	3:56	3:19	3:25

\* Zehetmair begins his recording of the *Adagio* with 11 seconds of silence, which I have subtracted from the time in this table to better comprehend the implications of tempo; the actual running time of the track is 3:25.

\*\* All three performers take both repeats in this movement.

*Tempo rubato*, or 'stolen time', is commonplace in many interpretations of Bach's solo violin music; many violinists feel inclined to disregard notated rhythm to 'bring out' any implied polyphony. This is not just an invention of the romantic period: baroque historical treatises advocate local, bar-level rubato within a generally stable tempo, though it is not until the nineteenth century that speeding up in the middle of a phrase becomes commonly mentioned.<sup>48</sup> Quantz wrote that any accompaniment should maintain a steady tempo, regardless of a soloist indulging in rubato, warning against being

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<sup>47</sup> Ido Abravaya, *On Bach's Rhythm and Tempo*, (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2006), 141.

<sup>48</sup> Robin Stowell, *The Early Music Violin and Viola: A Practical Guide*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) 99-100.

‘beguiled into dragging in the tempo rubato’.<sup>49</sup> Leopold Mozart agrees, writing that any effect the soloist wanted to create would be ‘demolished if the accompanist did not maintain a true tempo.’<sup>50</sup> This may seem irrelevant here in Bach’s solo violin music, but it follows that a violinist should imagine a steady accompaniment, even when ‘stealing’ time! The lack of a bass continuo or other accompaniment means there is no actual dictation of each beat, but the concept of a soloist deviating from the beat but being sure to find it again could still be applicable. Similarly, the relationship between expressive playing and musical structure seems to be a recurring theme in conversations around rubato: a good understanding of structure, whether actual theoretic structure or personal interpretation, is a prerequisite for convincing rubato.<sup>51</sup>

I will now examine each movement separately. I have chosen to do this because each movement exhibits very different approaches to tempo and timing – rubato in *Adagio* is incomparable to rubato in *Fuge*, whereas comments about aspects of playing like vibrato were more transferrable.

#### **4.4.1 Adagio**

Choosing a tempo for the *Adagio* seemed fairly straightforward to me when I first came to this movement several years ago. I never experimented much with different tempi, and opted for one most similar to Podger’s. She plays ‘in the middle’ of our three and her tempo helps to create a warm and calm mood: not too fast, not too slow. Her performance is light and improvisatory, but organised and controlled. Heifetz by comparison plays the slowest, and the choice has a remarkable effect on the tone of the movement, which becomes anguished; almost painful. Finally, Zehetmair plays the fastest of all, creating quite an urgent atmosphere in places.

It could be argued that this movement lends itself best to rubato or rhythmic alteration. Bach implies an improvisatory style, and some performers take this as a blessing to take extensive liberty with tempo and rhythm. The ‘wackiest’ timing decisions of my chosen three violinists are Zehetmair’s. There are many places where movement forward is realised at great speed in his faster tempo, making for a very gestural interpretation. He also finds some very untraditional places to take time, highlighting lines and polyphony that have not been clear to me in the past. Heifetz and Podger also make use of tempo rubato, but in a less intrusive manner. Most of Podger’s rubato

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<sup>49</sup> Sandra P. Rosenblum, “The Uses of Rubato in Music, Eighteenth to Twentieth Centuries”, *Performance Practice review*, Vol 7 (1994), 34.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>51</sup> Stacey Davies, “Bring Out the Counterpoint: Exploring the Relationship Between Implied Polyphony and Rubato in Bach’s Solo Violin Music”, *Psychology of Music*, (2009), 302.



exists at phrase level, working in parallel with dynamics. For example, she often speeds up through an ascending scalar run of thirty-second notes, making the first few notes longer than their true value, and shortening the last few. Heifetz, by contrast, moves almost like a metronome in this movement, with only some very subtle time-taking at the end of certain gestures. For example, he takes a little too long with the first note of bar two, a little too long in the 32<sup>nd</sup> note rest in bar three, the second eighth note in bar 8, the last sixteenth in bar 13 and the last eighth of bar 15 to be labelled entirely 'metronomic'.

#### 4.4.2 Fuga (Allegro)

As a tempo marking, 'Allegro' should be considered in terms of its context, says Roger North (1728). Allegros can be divided into two categories: fuges and 'quasi divisions on a ground'. North argues that fuges and swift tempos 'do not agree well together', because confusion will mean that the intricacies of polyphonic detail are lost. He disputes movements of etude-like virtuosity, pointing out that 'when the master is of that sport, he writes *Presto*, or *Prestissimo*, but never when a fuge is thought of'.<sup>52</sup>

One wonders, therefore, whether North would have approved of Podger's interpretation of *Fuga* in this sonata by Bach. Her recording is nearly a minute longer than the other two, noticeably slower. She makes the impossibly difficult polyphony sound calm and thoughtful, without losing the momentum of the fugue. This is partly due to her extensive use of tempo rubato in this movement, which she uses to bring out the different voices or emphasise interesting chord progressions. Zehetmair uses rubato in the polyphonic passages in a similar way but far more demonstratively, coupling more extreme tempo alteration with extreme dynamic changes. In my opinion, Zehetmair sounds the most virtuosic and romantic in this movement – any influence of historically informed performers has been moved to one side in favour of showcasing an impressive left hand capability and enjoying Bach's unexpected chord progressions! Despite being almost exactly the same length, Heifetz's recording seems slower than Zehetmair's. This is because he does not use such extreme rubato; there are no great rushes forward in Heifetz's interpretation. Instead, Heifetz makes use of more high level rubato, often broadening out towards the end of a section, even choosing to play one section slightly slower because of a change in mood.

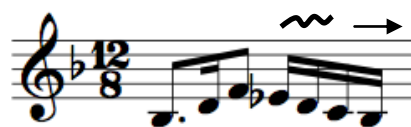
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<sup>52</sup> Abravaya, *On Bach's Rhythm and Tempo*, 57-58.

One can directly compare how each violinist treats the passages of sixteenth notes in this movement. These make up four significant sections of the piece where there are no chords or polyphony, and therefore fewer technical issues which might have changed how tempo has been approached. I would estimate that Zehetmair plays them least in tempo, making the most of any lines or voices he can pick out in these sections. Podger maintains a steadier beat, bringing out any implied polyphony but using rubato on a lower level to keep each beat largely in the right place. Any longer beats are usually the first ones – for example, from bar 64-66, Podger elongates each first beat by taking time over the first four sixteenth notes. After this, she moves slightly forward in beats two, three and four in order to regain lost time. Often, Heifetz will hold the only first note of certain bars for slightly longer than their true duration, but then continue the rest of the sixteenths in tempo. Other rubato used by Heifetz has him slowing down in some descending sequences, such as in bar 46.

#### 4.4.3 Siciliana

This movement can be differentiated from the rest in that its form and rhythm are based on a dance: choosing the right tempo and rhythmic freedom is paramount to maintaining the integrity of its function as a dance movement. Our three performers have wildly different ideas about what this perfect tempo might be, and as a result this movement exhibits the greatest differences in running times of the whole sonata. Heifetz's is the longest; it certainly feels slowest. His tendency to sustain through the full duration of each note coupled with this slow speed mean that it is hard to imagine dancing to his interpretation! In the main rhythmic figure, shown below, Heifetz consistently begins the group of four sixteenth notes slower and gains speed in the last two. He does this to varying degrees: it is most pronounced when this figure is developed in different keys, for example in bar 11.



*Figure 12. main rhythmic figure in Siciliana, including markings to show Heifetz's tempo tendencies*

Heifetz also chooses to reduce speed even more in bar 9, where the tonality becomes minor, making for a very affecting middle section. Zehetmair's version feels more dance-like, and is the fastest. Though a listener will have a sense of pushing or slowing tempo in parts of his recording, much of Zehetmair's rubato is low level rhythmic alteration which leaves the beat fairly constant. For

example, he double-dots many of the dotted rhythms, making them feel light without disturbing the beat. Podger's recording of *Siciliana* is on average slower than Zehetmair's, but faster than Heifetz's. I am reminded of her *Adagio*: she plays comfortably and calmly, without urgency.

#### 4.4.4 Presto

While some might argue that this is also a dance movement, generally it is viewed as a sort of 'moto perpetuo': 'presto' is one of the fastest tempo markings used by Bach, and this movement comprised of driving sixteenth notes is the only 'presto' in the whole of the *Six Sonatas and Partitas*. It is made up of two sections, both with repeats which are observed by Podger, Zehetmair and Heifetz.

First, I will examine Heifetz's interpretation. Heifetz plays with virtuosic speed throughout, only slowing his general tempo in a ritardando in the last three bars of the movement. However, he does use a low level rubato in certain bars by holding significant notes for longer than their true duration. This always happens at the start of a bar, and more frequently in the second section and in repeats: for example in bars 83 and 87, the first notes (A and F sharp) are held for at least twice their

true length. It has been noted by Fabian and Ornoy that Heifetz often includes more expressive techniques such as rubato in repeats, and Heifetz does indeed make the alteration in these bars even more pronounced upon repetition.<sup>53</sup> This is also true of the slurs at the start of bars 113 and 115: Heifetz always gives them time, but emphasises this rubato even more in the repeat. Furthermore, in the second repeat taking time at the start of a bar is more frequent, and the first note of bar 75 and 76, bars 90 and 94, and bar 117 are all held. In highlighting these notes Heifetz effectively signposts Bach's interesting changing harmonies, and by varying his repeats he ensures that the listener hears them in a different way each time.

Zehetmair starts his *Presto* at a similarly virtuosic speed, but it quickly becomes apparent that his is a very different interpretation with a constantly changing tempo. The overriding impressions given by Zehetmair in this movement are ones of direction and shape: each bar is either leading somewhere or else easing away from a high point reached in the bars preceding it, and almost no two bars have a steady beat in common. However, even within larger shapes lasting several bars, Zehetmair creates micro-level shapes. This creates a rather anxious or 'fluttering' mood, and it could be said that it also creates confusion by disturbing the overall outlines Zehetmair is trying to create: it is movements like

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<sup>53</sup> Fabian and Ornoy, "Identity in Violin Playing", 12.

this which make Zehetmair's Bach so controversial. I have chosen a passage which exhibits this tendency and drawn arrows to show Zehetmair's direction and tempo.

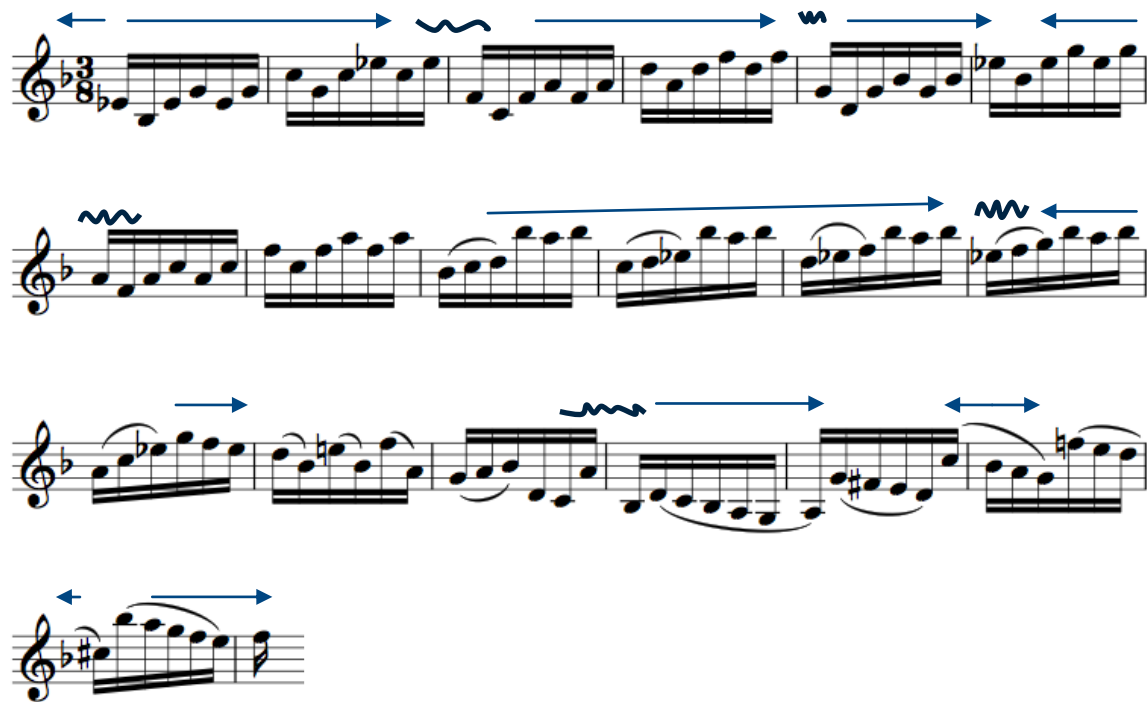


Figure 13. Transcription of bars 17-36, including arrows to show Zehetmair's rubato

Finally, Podger takes a far less extreme tempo for her *Presto*, but does indulge in a similarly frequent rubato to Zehetmair. However, the manner of her rubato is surprisingly closer to that of Heifetz: she too chooses certain notes (often the first note in a bar) to hold in order to emphasise the start of a sequence or dramatic harmony. It is true that Podger actually uses this rhythmic alteration much more habitually than Heifetz does. Examples can be found straight away in bars 5 and 7, bars 12 and 13, and bars 17 – 24. Podger also sometimes creates an 'upbeat' by making space between the fifth and sixth sixteenth notes in a bar, shown below using commas.



Figure 14. Transcription of bars 89-94, showing Podger's process in creating an 'upbeat'.

## 5. PRESENTATION OF MY OWN RECORDINGS

To accompany this thesis, I present five recordings: a recording of my initial interpretation (recorded before the bulk of this thesis had been completed), three very different stylistic approaches to the first nine bars of *Adagio*, and finally a more considered and personal interpretation of this movement (recorded at the end of this process). With each imitation, I tried to identify key things that combined to make that performers sound or tone. Of course, some things about my natural playing style and technique were easier to change than others, and I used different practise techniques to try and replicate their sound as closely as possible, including playing along to their recordings to get a closer sense of their tempi and timing.

### 5.1 Recording 2A: Podger

There was not so much to concentrate on in my left hand when making this imitation: vibrato was not stifled but definitely not continuous, there was no unnecessary shifting, and I added any trills or ornaments present in her own recording. I also tried to play faster than is instinctive to me, as she does. In the main, when trying to replicate Podger's interpretation, I focussed on bow technique above anything else. Sadly, it was extremely difficult to accurately recreate the brightness and lightness of her sound using a modern bow, but I aimed to be as close as possible!

Firstly, I thought about varying my contact point. Watching videos of Podger told me that the 'squishy' feeling she creates when playing chords and slurs comes partly from moving the bow slightly into the bridge and then out again once the 'crunch' of a chord or a semi-tone 'squeeze' is over.<sup>54</sup> As Quantz suggests, slurs are stronger at the beginning and weaker at the end, creating gestures and avoiding un-authentic sustaining of the bow.<sup>55</sup> Here, Podger also varies the bow speed, playing with less velocity at the start of a slur and speeding up towards the end of the bow.

Where a modern player might aim to play up and down bows as similarly as possible, Podger seems to create particular resistance with her down bows and keeps up bows a little more 'airy'. In a masterclass in Hereford, Podger quotes a treatise of Tartini's 'articulation rule', that legato playing

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<sup>54</sup> "String Sessions: Rachel Podger Performs Bach and Biber" (2016, July) (Video File). Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QVb2xMXcyuw>.

<sup>55</sup> "Rachel Podger on Bach: Stylistic Subtleties" (2012, October) (Video File). Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uhcPDo3UPw0>.

should be reserved for when intervals between notes are small, so the bigger the jump, the more separated the notes should be.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, semi-tone steps can be 'squishy' and as smooth as possible: a very effective part of Podger's playing.

In the end, I was surprised to find that trying to play as Podger came the most naturally to me and that this style of playing Bach seemed the closest to my existing interpretation of the three. I found it valuable to think so much about the bow, particularly about bow speed. This has made for an effective recording. I am less happy with my habitual and rather un-historically informed vibrato, which I noticed I automatically wanted to employ in order to emphasise certain notes. For example, while Podger makes little fuss of the thirty-second note G which begins the scalic flourish at the end of bar 3, I found myself involuntarily giving it an accent and a wide vibrato. In actual fact, I agree with Podger that this note is less significant than the ones following it: they all lead to the Eb.

## **5.2 Recording 2B: Heifetz**

In immense contrast to Podger, I found Heifetz the most difficult to copy. Here, my attention shifted to the left hand and to the most distinctive part of his playing: his continuous finger vibrato. Technically, I found this very challenging because of the necessity to begin vibrating straight away, even through chords. I spent a while practising only the first chord, but still found that my habit of starting with little or no vibrato and then developing the note using vibrato ruined many recordings! Despite using so much vibrato, I needed to maintain a light left hand in order to replicate Heifetz's very light and singing shifts. These shifts are mainly shifts with a single finger, or sometimes landing note shifts: he never shifts with the start note finger as he wants the portamenti to be smooth and audible.

I also had to concentrate on phrasing when practising 'as' Heifetz. In general, I found that he makes longer and more sustained phrases than was natural to me. For example, there is little breathing space in the whole of the first phrase (the first bar and a half). Where Podger makes air and releases tension after almost every chord or gesture, Heifetz maintains the pressure with a bridge-side contact point, directing the phrase all the way to the G minor chord in bar 2. He continues to make impossibly long phrases throughout the movement, teaching me a valuable lesson in giving a long phrase direction. He also plays in a slower tempo than Podger and Zehetmair, making these long phrases even more striking.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

Finally, I had to work hard to play with strictly accurate rhythm: Heifetz plays almost metronomically the entire time. This was wholly useful to me, as years of playing this movement with a fairly free approach to rhythm have made me forget the relationship between notes. Though I will not imitate this aspect of Heifetz's playing in my final interpretation, I do think it is vital that I have a grasp of Bach's rhythm.

### **5.3 Recording 2C: Zehetmair**

Thomas Zehetmair's recording is full of ideas, many which seem to stem from the influence of historically informed contemporaries. He uses the bow in a similar way, but is even more demonstrative than Podger and exaggerates the changes in bow speed and contact point. Extremely noticeable is the rate at which he decays away from longer notes – unlike Heifetz, he does not always feel the need to sustain through a whole phrase, instead coming away from chords, often dying to nothing at the end of a long note without giving it its full value. Coupled with his taking time in many of these places, I think this creates quite a contemplative or improvisatory tone. However, another trait typical of Zehetmair's recording is his extreme forward motion in other places: for example, in bar 8 moving into the cadence where he pushes forward with great velocity. Thus, I think his great flexibility with time is one of Zehetmair's defining features in his performance of the whole work.

As well as tempo and the decay of longer notes, I also aimed to use very little vibrato but make it wide and slow when I did. This meant I was treating it as an ornament in the same way as I had with my imitation of Podger, but it actually had a very different effect.

In Zehetmair's own recording, he includes 11 seconds of absolute silence before beginning to play. I think this is significant in communicating the atmosphere he works to create for the whole of this movement: an almost cold, austere calmness. It is this which I worked hard to replicate when I practised 'as' Zehetmair.

### **5.4 Recording 1: my initial recording, and Recording 3: my 'informed interpretation'**

I made 'Recording 1' very close to the start of this thesis process, and I feel it represents well the way I played *Adagio* in the years leading up to this project. Now I have undertaken a study of performance practice in this piece, I find many things to comment on. I present this recording alongside 'Recording 3', to show the development of my interpretation over the last two years.

When I listen to 'Recording 3', I am happy that it sounds much more expressive than my less developed interpretation. I have used skills learnt during this project and the knowledge afforded to me whilst studying the playing of great violinists to express how I feel about this piece much more effectively.

I considered the first chord in detail in my comparative study, and wished to choose my own realisation of it in a similarly considered way. In my 'initial recording' I play most like Heifetz, splitting the in the middle and ending on the G alone. I find this approach too magnetic and without horizontal gesture which I now favour, having considered the way other violinists play chords. In my final recording, I try to emulate Zehetmair's first chord by playing the low G alone first and 'swinging' through the other notes: the way he plays this chord with great velocity and an effective circular feeling appeals most to me. However, I prefer to hold the chord a little longer than Zehetmair, and decay far less towards the end of the high G.

Generally speaking, I find timing and tempo far too erratic and unpredictable in my initial recording. Zehetmair has shown me that it is possible to pull this movement around in an intuitive way, and I can hear the difference his skill in this arena makes. Previously, I confused the tempo too much in quite an unintuitive way, especially in the ornamental 'gestural' passages, which often lack direction and purpose. In many places, I also judge relationships between the different note values are not also pronounced enough. An example of this is bar 13, where Bach's intended rhythm is not at all clear. When I re-record this movement, I tried hard to keep both Heifetz and Podger in my mind: the relationships between his note values are very clear, and I like the way she keeps a steady beat, even when using rubato. Where I have used a more extreme rubato, I have tried to keep it organised, with a clear vision for the direction of the phrase.

However, I find that many parts of my recording are reminiscent of Zehetmair's: I greatly admire his skill in creating different colours and demonstrative gestures, and enjoyed trying to recreate them where appropriate. For example, I find a new and special, more *sul tasto* sound when the figure of two pairs of slurred descending sixteenth notes occurs (the end of bars 5 and 18). I also enjoyed the extreme decay which Zehetmair employs and made use of this at the end of certain notes, for example in bar 13.

I am surprised to hear that I actually used some portamento in the 'initial recording', once between the last note of bar 13 and the first of bar 14, and a second time between the E flat and the B flat in



the third beat of bar 18. Because I enjoy the one in bar 18, I chose to include it in my 'considered interpretation'. The B flat seems to me a very expressive note and deserving of this special feature.

Listening to 'Recording 1', I notice a tendency to emphasise the first note of an ascending gesture, often using more bow and vibrato and making this note stand out. Now I wish think more about the overall shape I am trying to create instead, and start less in order to grow to the top of a phrase. Examples of places where this occurs are at the end of bar 1, where I emphasise the G instead of growing towards the top E flat; and in bar 13 after the fermata, where my developed tastes would have the B as the softest note in the bar, not the strongest as I play it in 'Recording 1'.

When completing my final recording, I also had to think more about the lowest notes in chords. I was unsatisfied with the weak prominence of the 'bass voice' in my initial recording, and though this could be in part due to a lack of technical proficiency with this piece at the time, I am more inclined to believe that I just had not considered the movement of the 'bass' in many of the cadences or sequences. For example, in bar 19-20, there is a clear bass voice (moving from G – B natural – C – C – F sharp). This is a very tense sequence harmonically speaking, especially when the bass line leaps up a tri-tone (augmented fourth), yet in my recording it is almost inaudible. I also feel that considering the issue of the 'bass' has given me more of a consistent idea of where to take time and where to drive forward with tempo: as mentioned previously, I feel that a cohesive plan was lacking in this area before.

Other decisions I made when arriving at my 'considered interpretation' include using less vibrato, modelling my approach on Podger's. I particularly tried to keep vibrato out of the thirty-second notes, as I can hear in 'Recording 1' that I was inclined to vibrate only on certain notes, creating some 'lumpy'-sounding gestures and again spoiling any sense of line. Like Zehetmair, I decided to leave the last chord free of vibrato in order to finish on a calm and 'un-fussy' note.

In terms of fingering, I took something from each interpretation I imitated as part of this thesis. In 'Recording 1', I use some higher positions in order to avoid the E string (examples of this occur in bars 6, 7 and 16). However, playing using Podger and Zehetmair's fingerings has shown me that I can make a feature of the E string's brightness, so I was inclined to change much of my fingering for 'Recording 3'. I have grown quite fond of Heifetz and Zehetmair's use of harmonics, so included one in bar 6: I enjoy the way it makes the phrase seem 'suspended', giving the descending bass line that follows more gravitas.

In general, I was inspired a lot by each of Podger, Zehetmair and Heifetz's playing when considering my choice of interpretation: it is difficult to pick one violinist who I aspired to play most like. I surprised myself with certain preferences such as the inclusion of a harmonic, some portato and a portamento. The meshing of these different interpretations and some of my own ideas confirms to me the importance of considering all options and making conscious decisions, rather than merely playing in the way that feels most natural to me. If I would summarise what I was aiming to take from each performer in my interpretation, I would be clear that Podger's varying bow speeds and 'squishy' bow technique, Heifetz's emotion and long phrases, and Zehetmair's changing colours were most important to me.

## 6. CONCLUSION

If the most important aim of this process was to guide me to develop a new, informed interpretation of this sonata, then it is practical to view 'Recording 1', 'Recording 3' and my response to them as a significant part of my conclusion. It is a shame that I did not have enough time to scrutinize the *Fuga*, *Siciliano* and *Presto* in as much detail as *Adagio* whilst undertaking this project. In the future I hope to apply a similar process to the other movements and see how my interpretations of them might change I undertook to do so. However, I think that enough of the work done on this recording is transferrable to be able to assert that my interpretation of Bach's music in general will have been enhanced. I have therefore succeeded in my primary aim: my 'considered interpretation' is undoubtedly far more developed than my 'initial recording', and I have been made more conscious of my performance decisions. I will be able to employ practice techniques that I have refined during this process in the future.

I am glad that I included an academic research element in this thesis. It was valuable for me to have discovered more about the development of the early music performance and read treatises which outline the 'historically informed' way of approaching different aspects of these pieces because it meant I had a better understanding of different approaches when undertaking my comparative study. Perhaps a better understanding of the 'Russian' school of romantic violin performance would have helped me make better judgements about Heifetz's playing, but as this was a thesis about approaches to Bach I conclude that the lack of this angle does not detract significantly my results. The relevance of history to me as a performer became clear upon reading articles and books by musicologists in this field.

Experiencing a baroque violin for the first time was also eye-opening to me as a modern instrumentalist. I have learnt that this instrument dictates much of the way a specialist plays and that while some aspects of historical performance has permeated mainstream performance, other aspects are impossible to recreate without a period instrument.

My detailed analyses of the interpretations of Podger, Heifetz and Zehetmair were arguably the most challenging part of this project. I have never undertaken this type of research before and found listening to the recordings with such scrutiny very difficult, particularly when trying to analyse and make educated guesses about each performance technique. The amount of contrast between violinists revealed in my comparative study was extraordinary. Trying to imitate each performer was

also demanding: aside from the fact that I, a student, was attempting to emulate world-class violinists, it was hard to change aspects of my technique which are so ingrained in my playing. Nevertheless, I feel like I learnt a lot from trying to use vibrato like Heifetz, rubato like Zehetmair, and bow speed like Podger. As mentioned above, I found it most natural to imitate Podger's *Adagio*. This could be seen as testament to how far historically informed performance has permeated mainstream performance: in conservatoires and schools, teachers teach in a slightly informed way. In my experience, students are often told that they can only reject the 'rules' once they know them. Further research should probably include a wider range of performers as it could be argued that my interpretation now is too much like a Heifetz/Podger/Zehetmair hybrid.

All in all, I would conclude that a violinist should be tolerant of all heart-felt interpretations and aware of all possible approaches to Bach. At the start of this process, I strongly disliked Heifetz's interpretation of the G minor *Sonata*, but now I can value many aspects of it. Because baroque specialists exist, we will always be aware of history, but let us leave the search for true 'authenticity' to them and play Bach how he inspires us as modern, mainstream performers. Performance tradition and culture is far richer when it is diverse. In the end, I believe that this music is strong enough to speak through any interpretation in any decade.

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